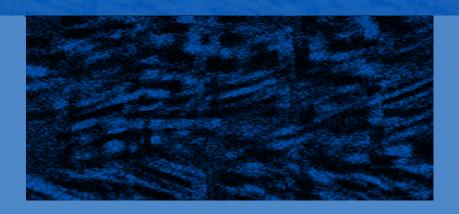
Looking Beyond the Five Family-Based Strategies



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Looking Beyond the Five Family-Based Strategies

For the most part, this guide focuses on effective strategies that practitioners can apply as they work directly with families, and on the family as a system of relationships. While these relationships are extremely

important in a child's life, the family has other functions as well. In this Conclusion, we offer some additional steps that families can take to enhance prevention efforts that target what we have called the *family climate* and the *larger environment*.

THE FAMILY CLIMATE

A child's family is his or her primary environment. Children are influenced by many factors outside the home, but the family is a critical place of development. The family is the setting in which a child begins to develop a sense of the world—of what is right or wrong, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Children develop this sense in part through what their parents tell them, and by observing their parents' actions and listening to their conversations with others. For example, children are likely to imitate the mannerisms and table manners of their parents, answer the telephone in the same fashion, and use the same expressions (even slang or swear words) that

they hear their parents use. We call the environment in which children learn these things the "family climate."

There are several things that parents can do to create a family climate that discourages the use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs. They can be divided into three categories: access, rules, and attitudes.

Access

Parents can take steps to reduce their child's *access* to substances, particularly alcohol and tobacco. A survey of youth in grades 7 to 12 conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, found that approximately 25 percent of twelfth graders obtain alcohol from their parents, with or without their knowledge. Younger students are even more likely to access alcohol in this way; nearly 75 percent of seventh graders who said they drink claimed to get alcohol from their parents.⁶⁴

The same study found that close to twothirds of all students who drink buy their own alcohol. Other studies that examined the ability of minors to purchase alcohol in various towns and cities found that they were successful in 44 to 97 percent of attempts.⁶⁵ Similarly, several studies of tobacco-control interventions found that prior to efforts to reduce sales to youth, adolescents were able to buy cigarettes between 57 and 74 percent of the time.⁶⁶

Parents can help limit their children's access to alcohol and tobacco by:

- not keeping alcohol or tobacco in the house, or keeping it locked up and inaccessible to children or adolescents
- not providing alcohol or encouraging alcohol use at parties or celebrations for adolescents
- communicating with other parents to ensure that they take the same precautions
- working with other members of the community, local businesses, and law enforcement to support laws restricting youth access to alcohol and tobacco
- encouraging and supporting law enforcement efforts to reduce sales of illegal drugs (e.g., attending community meetings to voice support, taking part in community patrolling or other initiatives)

Rules

Parents can begin to teach their children about what is and is not appropriate or acceptable behavior by establishing *rules*. Parents can adopt a variety of rules to demonstrate that alcohol and drug use is unacceptable for their children. Here are some examples:

- Children may not consume alcohol until they are of legal drinking age.
- Children may not smoke or use drugs of any kind.
- Children may not attend parties or gatherings where minors use alcohol or drugs.

While the mere existence of rules can show children how their parents feel about alcohol and drug use, such rules are much more effective if they are enforced. By spelling out the sanctions for breaking rules before disobedience occurs, parents can send the message that they are serious about the forbidden behavior. For example, in the course of a conversation about the dangers of using drugs, a parent might tell his or her children that if they are found to have used drugs, they will be grounded.

Some rules are more difficult to enforce than others, especially for teenagers, who spend more time out of the house and without direct supervision. However, parents can take some steps to increase the likelihood that their children will obey the rules even when they are out of the house. Here are some examples:

 talking to other parents before their children attend parties, to ensure that there

- will be adult supervision and that no alcohol will be served
- becoming active in the community, such as volunteering in schools or faith-based activities, and getting to know fellow parents and community members; children will be less likely to misbehave or associate with others who misbehave if they know that their parents may hear about it.

Attitudes

Children inherit many of their parents' mannerisms, habits, and beliefs—in general, their *attitudes* about a variety of things, by watching, listening, and imitating. For example, nutritionists have long recognized that children learn their dietary and nutritional habits and preferences at home. If parents overeat or obsess about food and weight, or conversely, if parents pursue proper nutrition and have a healthy attitude toward food, children will tend to adopt similar patterns.⁶⁷

By demonstrating healthy attitudes about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, parents can help their children develop similar sensibilities. Guiding children toward healthy attitudes requires much more than talking to them directly about substance use and abuse. Children will notice if parents do not heed their own advice or take

on alternative perspectives when interacting with their own friends. In other words, in order for parents to convey healthy attitudes to their children, they themselves must first adopt healthy actions, not just beliefs.

Here are some things that parents can do to convey healthy attitudes to their children:

- Provide children with accurate information about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study found that almost 80 percent of students didn't know the relative strengths of different alcoholic beverages, and over 33 percent believed that drinking coffee or taking a cold shower can "sober you up."68
- Encourage children to critically evaluate advertisements and programs that glamorize smoking or alcohol or drug use (in other words, acquire media literacy).
- Refrain from laughing or making jokes about people on television or in real life who are intoxicated.
- Maintain the same disposition toward substance use in relationships with adults; children may pick up on their parents' laughing with friends about drinking too much or using drugs.
- Follow their own guidance; drink in moderation or not at all, and avoid tobacco and nonmedical use of other drugs altogether.

THE LARGER ENVIRONMENT

Children are also influenced by the community overall and by the larger environment. Prevention aimed at the larger environment is based on the community systems perspective, which views a community as a group of people engaged in shared social, cultural, political, and economic processes. ⁶⁹
As Michael Klitzner points out, "The shared environment [norms, regulations, and availability] supports some behaviors and thwarts others." ⁷⁰

Families and members of families can play an important role in bringing about changes in the larger environment. As individuals, professionals, and members of community groups and state and national organizations, parents can get involved in changing the environment in ways that contribute to prevention. The following five environmental strategies can have a significant impact:⁷¹

Policy: Public policies—laws and regulations—can be designed to limit access to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and to decrease the problems associated with their use.

Enforcement: In order for laws and regulations to deter people and businesses from specified illegal behaviors, they must be accompanied by significant penalties and they must be enforced.

Education: In order for environmental strategies such as policy changes, enforcement, and community collaborations to be successful, the public must know what measures are available to them and what policies they are expected to follow.

Communications: Media and other communications efforts can be used to help change or reinforce community norms concerning tolerance of sales to and use by minors.

Collaboration: Coalition-building activities that engage businesses, community groups, and schools can help to raise awareness about the issues of substance abuse and can coordinate prevention and treatment services for more effective delivery.

For more information on how individuals can contribute to changing the larger environment, please see Appendix B.

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